



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SYLVESTER'S "DU BARTAS"

Joshua Sylvester, once an idol of the hour, ceased to attract readers after the middle of the seventeenth century until early in the nineteenth century, when his name was frequently connected with Milton's, whom he is supposed to have influenced.

This pedantic poet, born in Kent in 1563, was, at the age of ten, sent to Southampton to study under Hadrianus Savaria, along with such pupils as Thomas Lake and Robert Ashley.¹ There he attained great proficiency in French, and being unable to enter a university, was placed with a trading firm; as a merchant or agent for English firms, he was often in Holland, France and Germany. Phillips, the nephew of Milton, says, "the silver-tongued Sylvester was so accomplished as to understand French, Spanish, Dutch, Italian, and Latin."

He hailed the accession of James I, and wrote an anti-tobacco tract called "Tobacco Battered and Pipes Shattered About Their Ears by a Volley of Holy Shot, Thundered from Mount Helicon," to gain the favor of his highness, who hated² the weed. While the King refused the petition for a clerkship in the House of Commons, Prince Henry in 1606 made him groom of his chamber with a pension of twenty pounds a year. On this Anthony-a-Wood wrote:³ "Queen Elizabeth had a great respect for him, King James had a greater, and Prince Henry greatest of all, who valued him so much that he made him his first poet pensioner." Sylvester's lament over the Prince's death in 1612 seems sincere. In 1613, he found another patron, George Abbot, who enabled him to obtain a secretaryship in the service of the merchant adventures. This took him from England to Middelburg, where he spent his last five years. "But his forwardness to correct the vices of the age exposed him to a powerful resentment; and his country is said⁴ to have treated him with ingrati-

¹ Dictionary of National Biography, article by Thos. Seecombe.

² See Johnson's *Universal Cyclopaedia*, (VII: 861).

³ Wood's "Athenæ Oxon.," ed. by Bliss, (I: 594).

⁴ *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum*, by Edward Phillips, Cant. 1800.

tude." He died at Middelburg on the twenty-eighth of September, 1618.

During the whole of his life his leisure was given to reading or writing poetry. Many occasional verses, dedicated to the nobility, had procured for him a certain degree of local reputation.⁵ In 1592 appeared the first translation of Du Bartas's *La Semaine*; a second edition in 1605, dedicated to James I; others in 1608, 1611, and 1613, had all of Du Bartas and Sylvester, while that of 1641 included a translation of "Judith" by Thomas Hudson.⁶

Du Bartas (1544-1590), when not employed in politics or war, had devoted his life to study and contemplation. His religion was of a pious nature and his meditations consequently serious. His great desire was to produce one poem, partly descriptive and partly didactic, in which the whole history of the world, as set forth in the Scripture and Christian belief, should be treated in a series of connected cantos, arranged symbolically into two weeks. The first week was to embrace the literal week of the creation of the world, and include a paraphrase, in seven cantos, of the seven days of creation, as given in Genesis, together with suitable reflections arising out of each. The second week was to give a further history of the world as related in the Old and New Testaments. The first part was finished and published during his life; of the second, only four days were completed. The popularity of the first part was unprecedented — thirty editions being exhausted in six years. The opinion of the French people was confirmed by the verdict of other nations, since it was translated into Latin, Italian, Spanish, German and English.

James VI, Thomas Hudson, Sir Philip Sidney, Ashley, Wm. Lisle and others translated portions into English, but Sylvester's work was soon established as the most complete and popular.

⁵Of these, the "Contented Mind," and "Were I as Base as is the Lowly Playne" (Davidson's "Poetical Rhapsody," 1602, not included in Sylvester's edition, 1641), are very superior to Sylvester's other sonnets, in daintiness, grace, and felicity. "From thy faire looks I count my Kalendar" or "O eyes more beauteous than those blazing eyes," or "Wilt thou not yet believe how deare I love thee?" closely resemble his other works in series of questions, repetitions, antitheses, and conceits.

⁶Grosart's Edition of Works of Sylvester (Two vols, 1880).

There were various reasons for Sylvester's selection of this. In the first place, if well translated, it was likely to be successful, since Du Bartas was the spiritual poet of the hour; further, the religious sympathy between the two men was profound. Sylvester was strongly Puritan, of a serious and pious mind, with a fondness for such themes. The translation became a standard English classic, and remained so until 1660 — after which time Sylvester was referred to as a pedantic and fantastic old poet.

In the introduction are many sonnets, poems by Daniel, Johnson, Gay-Wood, Davies, Hall, E. G., R. R., R. N., etc., in praise of Sylvester, an inscription to the King for this work of the Muses, signed by themselves and their high treasurer, Bartas the great, and "ingrosst" by Sylvester. A *Corona Dedicatoria* has a sonnet to each muse, in which the last line of one serves as the first line to the next. In the *Indignis*, "he drives away all profane hands, Green sick wits, prying Critiks, all who lack learning; he welcomes the King, Queen, good wits, milde Censors, Maecenas and each learning lover." It is dedicated by lines arranged in pyramidal form, to "England's Appelles (rather Our Apollo), World's wonder Sydney, that rare more-than-man," etc.⁷

However tiresome and unattractive this may be to us, it appealed very strongly to Sylvester's contemporaries. Commendatory verses are given Sylvester in Chas. Fitzgeffrey's *Affanix* (1601), Sir Clement Edmondes's "Observations on Cæsar's Commentaries" (1609), Jas. Johnson's *Epigrammatum Libellus* (1615), Herring's "Mischief Mystery" (1617), Francis Davidson's "Poems" (1621), J. Blaxton's "English Usurer" (1634), etc.

Samuel Daniel⁸ wrote of him:

As thou industrious Sylvester has wrought,
And heere enritch'd us with th' immortal store
Of other's sacred lines : which from them wrought
Comes by thy taking greater than before ;
So hast thou lighted from a flame devout,
As great a flame, that never shall give out.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Works, (I: 281).

The influence of Sylvester is easily traceable in the poems of Daniel, where he strives for enriched adjectives, balanced phrases, antithetic clauses, invocations, with suitable epithets, "care-charmer Sleep," "thunder cracks of tyrant's threats," etc., as in the following:

Great pirate Pompey lesser pirates quails,
And whilst distraught ambition compasses,
And is encompass'd; while as craft deceives,
And is deceived; whilst man doth ransack man,⁹ etc.

Whereas we sat and sighed
And looked upon each other, and conceived
Not what we ail'd—yet something we did ail;
And yet were well, and yet were not well,¹⁰ etc.

John Davies of Hereford thought him immortal, and in the philosophical reflective verses, where religion, poetry and science were combined and in the complex sentiment for the Queen, of which each poet was the mouthpiece, they were surely in sympathy:

Then Joshua, the Sun of thy bright praise
Shall fixed stand in Art's faire Firmament
Til dissolutions date Times, Nights, and Days.

Jospeh Hall ¹¹ would make him an angel:

Bartas was some French Angel, girt with Bayes;
And thou a Bartas art, in English Layes.

and again:

He knows the grace of that new elegance,
Which sweet Philisides fetch'd of late from France,
That well beseem'd his high styled Arcady,
Tho' others mar it with much liberty,
In epithets to join two words in one.

⁹ To the Lady Margaret.

¹⁰ Hymen's Triumph.

¹¹ Hall's Satires, (VI: 1).

Hall is not far from him in style, as the lines will show:

Till they had sated their delicious eye;
Or search'd the hopeful thicks of hedgy rows
For briery berries, or hawes, or somer sloes.

or:

Was then no plaining of the brewer's scape,
Nor greedy vinter mixed the strained grape.
The king's pavilion was the grassy green
Under safe shelter of the shady treen.¹²

E. G., in a poem of three stanzas, was enraptured:

If divine Bartas (from whose blessed braines
Such works of grace, or graceful works did stream)
Were so admir'd for Wit's celestiall Strains
As made their Vertues Seate, the high'st extream,
Then, Joshua, the sun of thy bright praise
Shall fixed stand in Art's faire Firmament,
.
If thine be only His, and His be thine
They are (like God) eternal, sith Divine.¹³

R. R., after referring to the graces he found in Chaucer,
Spenser and "Sweet" Daniel, saw

How Salust's English Sun [our Sylvester]
Makes moon and stars to vaile.
.
So much, for Matter and for Manner, too,
Hath he outgon those that the rest outgoe.

In an acrostic by R. N., Gen., the translator is styled "Sweet"
Sylvester,

Ease-charming Eccho of his sacred Voice.

R. N. wrote a sonnet of gratitude to Chapman and Phaer for
their translations, in which he said he was even more indebted
to Sylvester, whose work was "grave, learned, deepe, delightful
and divine."¹⁴

¹² Golden Age, III: 1.

¹³ Sylvester's Works.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Lodge¹⁵ said, in his preface to the reader:

France hath a Bartas, for her Poet rare,
Whose school breeds up great wits beyond compare
And through the world his eloquence doth spread,
Himself the Ocean, whence these springs are fed.

Todd points out resemblances between Spenser and Du Bartas, in the addresses to Dido¹⁶ and Enoch,¹⁷ in the description of Despair,¹⁸ and says¹⁹ that "the tediousness of the translation is sometimes smoothed by phrases adopted from Spenser;" as

The lilies of her breasts, the rosie red
In either cheek,²⁰

was taken from

With rosy red
The bashful blood her snowy cheekes did dye.²¹

Ben Jonson, in 1609, wrote an epigram to him:

If to admire were to command, my praise
Might then both thee, thy work and merit raise,
But as it is (the child of ignorance,
And utter stranger to all airs of France),
How can I speak of thy great pains but err?
Since they can only judge, that can confer.
Behold! the rev'rend shade of Bartas stands
Before my thought, and in thy right, commands
That to the world, I publish for him, this:
"Bartas does wish thy English now were his,
So well in that are his inventions wrought,

¹⁵ "A Learned Summary upon the famous Poem of William of Saluste, Lord of Bartas, wherein are discovered all the excellent secrets in Metaphysical, Physical, Moral and Historical Knowledge, fitt for the learned to refresh their memories, and for younger students to abreviate and further their studies: wherein nature is discovered, art disclosed, and history laid open."—Translated out of the French by T. L. D., M.P., printed by John Grismand. London, 1621.

¹⁶ Shepherd's Calendar, II: 195.

¹⁷ Creation du Monde, ed. 1621, IV: 1.

¹⁸ Faerie Queen, I, 9, 50; Creation, etc., 215.

¹⁹ Todd's Spenser, 7, 491.

²⁰ Creation, etc., I, 498.

²¹ Faerie Queen, 2, 9, 41.

As his will now be the translation thought,
Thine the original, and France shall boast
No more the maiden glories she has lost."

However, in 1609²² he complained to Drummond of Hawthornden that the translation was not well done and that he (Jonson) wrote these verses before he knew French and could judge of the merit of Sylvester's translation. Drummond thought the translation of "Judith" and "Battle of Ivry" excellent. "His pains are much to be praised, the happy translation in sundry parts equalling the original."²³

Michael Drayton dedicated his "Moyses in a Map of His Miracles" (1604):

Sallust, to thee and Sylvester thy friend,
Comes my high poem peaceably and chaste;
Your hallow'd labors humbly to attend,
That wreckful Time shall not have power to waste.²⁴

In Drayton's power of using proper names in historical and geographical verse, in his fantastic descriptions, as in the armor of Pigwiggen,²⁵ whose coat of mail was of a fish's scale, whose rapier was a hornet's sting, whose helmet was a beetle's head, whose plume was a horse's hair, etc., or in his cataloguing of flowers, using descriptive epithets²⁶ as the "ague'd harebell, with luscious smell," "the crimson darnel flowers, brave carnations, oderiferous pink," etc., we see the influence.

In Chapman we find the pedantic love of the display of learning, in the many details of mythological and fantastic theories of contemporary science, showing the various degrees by heaping of words:

His heart, extremely straiten'd, burn'd
Beat, swell'd, and sigh'd as it would burst,²⁷

²² Jonson's *Conversations with Drummond*, printed by Shaks. Soc., 1842, I: 2.

²³ *Ibid*, I, 51.

²⁴ "Moses, His Birth and Miracles," by Michael Drayton. I: 130. Spenser Soc., 1892, No. 5.

²⁵ *Nymphidia*.

²⁶ *Polyolbion*, XV: 165.

²⁷ *Iliad*, 18.

Without was he
Set sad ashore, where 'twas his use to view
Th' unquiet sea, sigh'd, wept, and empty drew
His heart of comfort.²⁸

In Lord Brooke we find a similar frigidity, with all thoughts overladen with words and buried in wearisome verse:

Past Superstition! Glorious style of weakness!
Sprung from the deep disquiet of man's passion
To dissolution and despair of Nature.

Or, in speaking of humanity:

Born under one law, to another bound,
Vainly begot, and yet forbidden vanity,
Created sick, commanded to be sound.²⁹

Wither and Browne, intimate co-partners, pay tributes; the first:

O Daniel, Drayton, Jonson, Chapman, how
I long to see you with your fellow peers,
Sylvester matchless, glory of these years.³⁰

and further says that he assumes their style.

Browne,³¹ speaking of Ariosto, Petrarch and Tasso, said:

Divinest Bartas, whose enrichèd soul
Proclaim'd his Maker's worth, should so enroll
His happy name in brass; that Time nor Fate
That swallow all should ever ruinatè;
Delightful Saluste, whose all blessèd lays
The shepherds make their hymns on holy-days;
And truly say thou in one week hast penn'd
What time may ever study, ne'er amend.

The folio edition of Sylvester was published in 1621,³² by Humphrey Sownes on Bread-street Hill, who speaks of the translator as "that divine spirit" and "that worthy spirit," who

²⁸ *Odyssey*, 5.

²⁹ Mustapha.

³⁰ *Abuses Stript and Whipt*.

³¹ *Britannia's Pastorals*, II: 1, 942.

³² Masson: *Life of Milton*, I: 69-78; VI: 530, 557.

in his later years "confined his pen to none but holy and religious ditties." At this time Milton, a boy of thirteen, was with his parents on the same street. His father and the printer may have been friends. Todd³³ makes the statement that "Sownes supplied the youth with Spenser and Sylvester's 'Du Bartas.' " At any rate, everyone at St. Paul's was reading the work, and had he never received it at home, it could not have escaped him here. Sylvester and Spenser were read more closely than any other contemporary work of English verse. Men have busied themselves in pointing out the borrowings and imitations of Milton, but the general feeling is that the influence was mainly indirect and the parallelisms occasional and accidental rather than studied and deliberate. It is possible that since Milton studied it as a boy, frequent thoughts and expressions so fascinated him that they became naturalized and were unconsciously transfused into his own writings.

Many parallelisms are striking:

Milton: Jordan's clear streams.

Sylvester: Clear Jordan's self.

Milton: Why turned Jordan toward his crystal fountains?

Sylvester: And tow'rd the crystal of his double source
Compelled Jordan to retreat his course.

Milton: The hornèd moon³⁴ to shine by night.

Sylvester: Night's hornèd queen.

Milton: Her spangled sister's bright.

Sylvester: Those bright spangles that the heavens adorn.

Milton: The ruddy waves he cleft in twain,
Of the Erythrean main.

Sylvester: His dreadful voice, to save his ancient sheep
Did cleave the bottom of th' Erythrean deep.

Milton: But full soon they did devour
The tawney king with all his power.

³³ Todd's Milton, 1801, I: vi.

³⁴ Todd (Spenser, 5: 302) says that Spenser was the original of this. See "Faerie Queen," 4: 53: 9: "the horned moon three courses did expire."

- Sylvester*: But contrary the Red Sea did devour
The barb'rous tyrant with his mighty power.
- Milton*: Then to come in spite of sorrow
And at my window bid good morrow.
- Sylvester*: The cheerful birds, chirping him sweet good morrow
With Nature's music do beguile his sorrow.
- Milton*: There let Hymen oft appear in saffron robe.
- Sylvester*: In saffron robes and all his solemn rites,
Thrice sacred Hymen shall with smiling chear
Unite in one two loving turtles dear.

Dunster³⁵ gives hundreds of such similarities, and says it "contains, indeed, more material *prima stamina* of the "Paradise Lost" than . . . any other book. . . . My hypothesis is, that it positively *laid the first stone* of that '*monumentum aere perennius*.'" Nathan Drake³⁶ added more, and yet they may not mean much. Lauder³⁷ thought Milton indebted for numberless fine thoughts and elegant expressions, such as "palpable darkness," besides his "low trick of playing upon words, and his frequent use of technical terms," while Lodge³⁸ insists that he derived a "multiplicity of fine hints" . . . especially in philosophy and theology. Doubtless Milton read³⁹ and enjoyed him, but many of these comparisons are so general as to be found in any two liberal poets of the same age. Dryden said:⁴⁰ "I remember when I was a boy, I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's "Du Bartas" and was rapt in ecstasy when I read these lines:

Now when the Winter's keener breath began
To crystallize the Baltic ocean,

³⁵ C. Dunster: "Milton's Early Reading and *Prima Stamina* of 'Paradise Lost,'" London, (1800).

³⁶ Library Hours, 1820, 3: 123. An inquiry into the origin of "Paradise Lost."—Todd's Milton, 1801, I: 288-293.

³⁷ Essay on Misuse and Imitation of the Moderns.

³⁸ "Learned Summary of Du Bartas," by Thomas Lodge, London (1621).

³⁹ "Dès lors, il devint le chef d'une école nouvelle, et si ses disciples immédiats lui font peu d'honneur, il eut du moins la gloire d'inspirer Milton."—"La Vie et les Œuvres de Du Bartas," par Georges Pellissier, Paris (1883).

⁴⁰ "Dedication of the Spanish Friar" (1681), in Essays of Dryden, ed. by W. P. Ker, I: 247.

To glaze the lake, to bridle up the floods,
And periwig with wool the bald pate woods.

I am much deceived now if this be not abominable fustian, that is thoughts and words ill sorted, and without the least relation to each other; yet I dare not answer for an audience, that they would not clap it on the stage; so little value there is to be given to the common cry, that nothing but madness can please madmen, and a poet must be of a piece with the spectators to gain a reputation with them." His sober judgment was⁴¹ that the connection of epithets or conjunction of two words in one, while frequent and elegant in Greek, was "unluckily attempted in English by Sir P. Sidney and the translator of 'Du Bartas.' "

But at this date both Du Bartas and Sylvester had lost their favor. The Germans have been more fond of the former in recent years than either the French⁴² or English.⁴³ Goethe liked him and thought him a true poet.⁴⁴ To-day no reader will deny his constant uncouthness and bad taste, his lack of judgment, genius and scholarly attainments. Yet on general principles, any poet who was so talked of with admiration by so many successors, could not have been entirely worthless. Some epithets were well worthy of Milton, "but by far the greater proportion of his thoughts and expressions have a quaintness and flatness more worthy of Quarles and Wither."⁴⁵ To say the least, Joshua Sylvester deserves a judicious reading and an honorable mention.

KATHERINE JACKSON.

Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Mass.

⁴¹ The author's apology for heroic poetry and poetic license, prefixed to "The State of Innocence" in *Essays*, I: 189.

⁴² For a full study of Du Bartas and his French imitators, see "La Vie et les Œuvres de Du Bartas," par Georges Pellissier, Paris (1883), who asserts that Taylor, Moore, and Byron were inspired by Du Bartas.

⁴³ Enthusiastic eulogies may be read in *Frazer's Magazine* for May, 1842, (II: 918), and *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 1846 (II: 339).

⁴⁴ Goethe's *Saemmtliche Werke in Vierzig Baenden*, Stuttgart (1877), XXXIII: 175.

⁴⁵ T. Campbell in "Essay on English Poetry" (1819).